

NCA  
VOC FOR PGM/FN  
BACKGROUND NO. 5-5840  
FRED BROWN/NEW DELHI

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# BANGLADESH ELECTION

ANNCR:

VOTERS IN BANGLADESH WILL GO TO THE POLLS JUNE THIRD TO VOTE IN THAT COUNTRY'S FIRST DIRECT PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION. CORRESPONDENT FRED BROWN HAS THIS BACKGROUND REPORT FROM OUT SOUTH ASIA BUREAU.

VOICE:

ALTHOUGH TEN CANDIDATES ARE CONTESTING THE ELECTIONS, ONLY TWO ARE CONSIDERED SERIOUS CONTENDERS. THEY ARE THE PRESIDENT OCCUPANT OF THE PRESIDENTIAL PALACE, GENERAL ZIAUR RAHMAN, WHO ALSO SERVES AS COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF THE ARMED FORCES, AND ANOTHER MILITARY MAN GENERAL M.A.J. OSMANI.

A FORMER BANGLADESH COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF,, GENERAL ZIAUR ASSUMED POWER IN NINETEEN SEVENTY-FIVE FOLLOWING A SERIES OF COUPS AND COUNTER-COUPS THAT SUCCEEDED THE OVERTHROW AND MURDER OF THE COUNTRY'S FIRST HEAD OF STATE SHEIK MUJIB-UR RAHMAN. IN MAY OF THE NEXT YEAR, GENERAL ZIAUR, NOW FORTY-THREE, WON A MASSIVE VOTE OF CONFIDENCE IN A NATIONWIDE REFERENDUM.

IN CALLING THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION, GENERAL ZIAUR SAID IT WOULD HELP ESTABLISH A STABLE GOVERNMENT AND PAVE THE WAY FOR TO USE THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION TO BUILD A SECURE POLITICAL BASE IN ADVANCE OF NEW PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS SCHEDULED THIS COMING DECEMBER. SINCE, AS COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF THE ARMED FORCES, HE ALSO IS THE COUNTRY'S CHIEF MARTIAL LAW ADMINISTRATOR IN A COUNTRY THAT REMAINS UNDER MARTIAL LAW, GENERAL ZIAUR IS CONSIDERED TO HAVE MOST OF THE ADVANTAGES.

INDEED, ONE OF THE PRINCIPAL DEMANDS OF HIS OPPONENTS HAS BEEN THAT HE RESIGN FROM THESE POSITIONS. GENERAL ZIAUR HAS

REFUSED ON GROUNDS THAT TO DO SO WOULD CREATE A DANGEROUS POWER VACUUM. HOWEVER, HE HAS PROMISED TO PROVIDE HIS OPPONENTS WITH FREE TRANSPORTATION AND OTHER FACILITIES TO ENABLE THEM TO CAMPAIGN AGAINST HIM.

GENERAL OSMANI, THE PRINCIPAL CONTENDER, IS BACKED BY A FIVE-PARTY COALITION THAT INCLUDES THE AWAMI LEAGUE -- THE PARTY OF THE LATE SHEIKH MUJIB-UR RAHMAN. IN ITS ELECTION MANIFESTO, THE FRONT HAS PLEDGED IF ELECTED TO RESTORE SHEIK MUJIB TO WHAT IT CONSIDERED HIS RIGHTFUL PLACE IN HISTORY. DESPITE THE DOWNFALL OF SHEIK MUJIB, THE AWAMI LEAGUE REMAINS THE LARGEST AND BEST ORGANIZED POLITICAL FORCE IN THE COUNTRY.

GENERAL ZIAUR, APPEALING TO THOSE OF HIS COUNTRYMEN TO RECALL THE EXCESSES OF SHEIK MUJIB'S ONE-PARTY RULE, HAS MADE MUCH OF HIS PLEDGE TO RESTORE DEMOCRACY TO THE COUNTRY. HE ALSO PLANS TO REPRESENT THE STABILITY THAT BANGLADESH NEEDS IF IT IS TO PROGRESS ECONOMICALLY. HIS CRITICS, ON THE OTHER HAND, INCLUDING GENERAL OSMANI ACCUSE GENERAL ZIAUR OF DICTATORIAL ASPIRATIONS. THEY CONTEND THAT GENERAL ZIAUR'S PROPOSALS FOR A PRESIDENTIAL SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT WOULD DESTROY PARLIAMENTARY DEMOCRACY -- THE SAME CHARGE, INCIDENTIALLY, THAT WAS MADE AGAINST SHEIK MUJIB AFTER HE ALTERED THE CONSTITUTION TO ESTABLISH ONE-PARTY RULE.

JS/PY